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FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8671
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L PHNOM PENH 000909

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS, D, P, INR, H FOR CINDY CHANG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/05/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [CB](#)
SUBJECT: CAMBODIA'S REVERSAL ON MEMORIAL STUPA

REF: PHNOM PENH 890

Classified By: Political Officer Janet Deutsch for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary. On June 29, the Ambassador confirmed in a meeting with Phnom Penh Governor Kep Chuktema that Prime Minister (PM) Hun Sen has given word not to destroy a memorial stupa commemorating a 1997 grenade attack on a Sam Rainsy Party rally killing 16 people (reftel). During a June 25 meeting between the Ambassador and Prime Minister Hun Sen, the PM appeared not to be aware of plans to remove the stupa.

However, the PM quickly agreed that removal of the stupa would be disrespectful of the dead and hurt Cambodia's international image, and said he would contact Phnom Penh's Governor to ensure the stupa stays put. According to the Governor, Hun Sen called him immediately after the June 25 meeting. End summary.

12. (C) On June 29, the Ambassador confirmed in a meeting with Phnom Penh Governor Kep Chuktema that Prime Minister Hun Sen has given orders not to remove a memorial stupa commemorating a 1997 grenade attack on a Sam Rainsy Party rally. The 1997 explosion killed 16 people and injured many more including an Amcit working for IRI. On June 25, PM Hun Sen agreed that removing the stupa would hurt Cambodia's international image and be disrespectful of the dead, and said he would call the Phnom Penh Governor to tell him not to take away the memorial. Soon after we left Hun Sen's residence on June 25, the Governor requested a meeting with the Ambassador.

13. (SBU) In early June, upon hearing that plans to beautify a park area in front of the National Assembly did not include the 1997 memorial stupa, the Ambassador asked for a meeting with the Governor, and wrote letters to him and Minister of Interior Sar Kheng. The letters spelled out that removing the stupa would be disrespectful to the dead, would provoke political opposition, and likely precipitate unrest. There was no response from the MOI but the Governor responded with a letter stating the Embassy needed to address the issue with the Royal Government in order for "us as local authorities" to take action. It was at this point the Ambassador decided to bring up the issue with Hun Sen. While the PM quickly identified the issue as a threat to Cambodia's image and as a needless provocation of the political opposition, it appears the decision was made without the PM's consent. Even after the Ambassador raised the matter with MOI and the Governor, Hun Sen seems not to have been informed.

14. (C) Comment. The incident serves to show how quickly action is taken when PM Hun Sen gives orders. However, contrary to perceptions that Hun Sen has total command of what goes on in Cambodia, the stupa uproar highlights what should be obvious but is lost on many interested groups -- he is not omniscient. Here is a case where someone at a lower level of government decided to take an action, possibly

deliberately against the Sam Rainsy Party, or even to undermine the PM himself, that would have affected Hun Sen's continuing quest for international respectability. We are left to wonder how uninformed the PM might be on other sensitive issues. End comment.

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